ONE VISION, MULTIPLE PATHWAYS

Secondary School Programming Process
Summary Report

Prepared For:
Department of Education

Yukon

Prepared By:
proactive
INFORMATION SERVICES INC.

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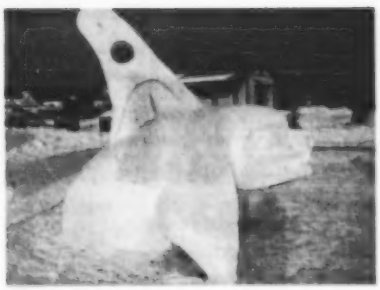

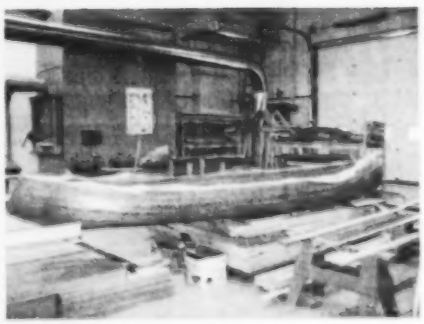

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to take this opportunity to thank numerous people for the assistance they provided as we undertook the Secondary School Programming Process.

First, we would like to thank the Secondary School Programming Advisory Committee for their commitment, advice, and support. The Committee has Departmental membership from the Public Schools, Advanced Education and First Nation Programs and Partnerships Branches, principals from the three secondary schools (and their designates), the school council chairs from those schools, representatives from Yukon Chiefs Committee on Education, CYFN and the Yukon First Nations Education Advisory Committee, a First Nations Elder, a representative from the Catholic Education Association of Yukon, and a representative from the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon. We appreciated their critical reflection, insights, humour, and continued focus on the best interests of students.

While they are also members of the Advisory Committee, a special thanks is extended to the administrators of the three secondary schools involved in the process: Darren Hayes and Christine Klaassen-St. Pierre (F. H. Collins Secondary School), Kerry Huff (Porter Creek Secondary School), and Trevor Ratcliff and Ryan Sikkes (Vanier Catholic Secondary School). They supported the process by organizing our school visits and the student focus groups, as well as by overseeing the administration of staff and student surveys.

We would also like to express our gratitude to various Department of Education staff. First, thank you to all those people who were interviewed and provided valuable background information, in addition to their professional insights. Thanks are extended to Mona Syed (Executive Assistant to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Schools) who helped with the organization and communication for the Committee meetings. As well, Kim Dolhan (Policy, Planning and Evaluation) has provided valuable support to us and the Advisory Committee through her expert minute taking. Michele Royle (Communications Coordinator, Department of Education) has ably assisted with public communications regarding the process. Janet McDonald (First Nations Programs and Partnerships) was instrumental in helping organize our community visits. Thank you all!

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Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to: the Yukon First Nations Education Advisory Committee who provided invaluable advice that guided our community visits; all the people in Whitehorse, Old Crow, Ross River, Teslin and Carcross who were interviewed, giving their time and insights; the educational staff who toured us around the various facilities; the school staff, students, and community members who completed questionnaires; the members of the public who shared their thoughts in the consultation sessions; as well as the students who were interviewed and those who participated in focus groups. The students shared their passion, their experiences, and their opinions, providing insights that were instrumental in shaping the process' conclusions and recommendations.

Linda E. Lee, Larry K. Bremner, Denise Belanger

Proactive Information Services Inc.
October 2008

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Between January and October 2008 a number of people participated on the Advisory Committee. Some people attended many meetings; others attended one or two meetings. We thank them all for their contributions.

Advisory Committee Member	Position
Christie Whitley, Committee Chair	Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Schools Branch, Department of Education
Kim Dolhan, Secretariat Support Mona Syed, Executive Assistant	Department of Education Public Schools Branch
Community and School Representatives	
Denise Horwood or Mary-Jane Oliver or Olga Terry or Sandra Henderson or Ken Quong	F.H. Collins School Council
Robert Walker	Porter Creek School Council
Paul Flaherty	Vanier Catholic School Council
André Bourcier	Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon
Lori Choquette Katie Shewfelt	Yukon Catholic Education Association
Mary Battaja Dorothy Smith	First Nations Elder, WND
Bill Bennett	First Nations Education Advisory Committee
Kim Rumley	Yukon Chief's Committee on Education
Shandell McCarthy	Council of Yukon First Nations
Jim Tredger	Yukon Teachers' Association
Karen Barnes	Vice-President, Yukon College
Darren Hays and Christine Klaassen-St.Pierre	Principal & Vice-Principal, F. H. Collins Secondary School
Kerry Huff	Principal, Porter Creek Secondary School
Trevor Ratcliff or Ryan Sikkes	Principal and Vice-Principal, Vanier Catholic Secondary School
Yukon Department of Education Representatives	
Rosemary Burns (January – August) Mike Woods (September – October)	Superintendent, Public Schools Branch
Pat Cassidy (January – August) Elizabeth Lemay (September – October)	Director of Programs and Services, Public Schools Branch
Tina Jules or Janet McDonald or Shereen Hill	First Nations Programs and Partnership Unit, Public Schools Branch
Gordon DeBruyn	Facilities Project Manager, Facilities
John Gryba	Advanced Education
Micki Deuling Kenyon (January – June)	Special Programs
Michele Royle Bob Walker	- Communications Coordinator - School Council Liaison
Consultants	
Linda E. Lee, Larry K. Bremner and Denise Belanger	Proactive Information Services Inc.

GLOSSARY

Brain-based Learning

Brain-based learning refers to instructional and assessment strategies that are based on recent research and new understandings of adolescent brain development.

Community Education Liaison Coordinator

CELCs, also known as Education Support Workers (ESWs), are employed by a First Nation. Situated in schools, they work with First Nations students to support school success. They act as a liaison and support to students coming from communities to Whitehorse, providing a bridge between First Nations communities and larger schools and community of Whitehorse.

Educational Stewardship

Everyone has responsibility for education. Each individual has a role and responsibility for his/her own education and for the education of others. Everyone is valued for the contribution they make towards education. Communities take responsibility for education of their children.

Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning is participative, taking place in purposefully constructed settings, whereby learners engage in structured experiences, combined with meaningful reflection, as a way to maximize learning. These structured experiences might include classroom "solution-finding" activities, outdoor activities, the performing arts, and Service Learning. Experiential Learning is suited to the acquisition of practical skills through the opportunity to practise techniques related to authentic tasks, undertaken in real-life settings. Wood Street programs are examples of experiential learning opportunities, but each secondary school also offers other experiential programming on-site.

Inclusion

Inclusion is "the value system which holds that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education. The practice of inclusion transcends the idea of physical location, and incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship and interaction," (Yukon Department of Education, *Special Programs Service: A Handbook of Procedures and Guidelines*, 1995).

Individual Education Plan (IEP)	An IEP describes educational measures that are being taken to meet the needs of the student. Some students need minor adaptations and minimum support. Others have more complex needs which may require detailed planning that covers educational programming, social skills, technology and health care. An IEP, requiring informed consent of parents, outlines the strengths and needs of the student, long and short term goals, recommendations for addressing student learning needs, and those responsible for implementing the plan.
Language Nest	A language nest describes a collection of language programs within a school which provides a focus for students learning language(s) in addition to their primary or home language.
Year Round Schooling	Year round schooling is but one example of an alternative schedule. 'Year round schooling' or 'year round education,' is, in fact, a misnomer. Students in 'modified calendar' schools generally receive between 180 and 220 instructional days per school year, similar to the number received by their peers following a 'traditional' calendar. However, the distinguishing factor of a modified calendar model is a reorganized calendar that more evenly distributes instructional and vacation periods throughout the year.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

The process of examining secondary programming in Whitehorse arises as a follow-up to a School Facilities Study completed in June 2007 and has direct implications for the future of F.H. Collins Secondary School. However, the work represents the initial step in a larger process of creating a secondary education system responsive to the needs and changing realities of secondary students in Yukon. Proactive Information Services Inc. was contracted by the Yukon Department of Education to undertake the project.

The project was guided by a Secondary School Programming Advisory Committee with broad governmental and stakeholder representation.[1] The role of the Advisory Committee was outlined as follows:

- to provide advice regarding process,
- to identify stakeholders to be included in the data collection process,
- to provide advice regarding appropriate methods for obtaining input within their context,
- to review the draft report to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness.

Proactive was contracted in December 2007, with the first meeting of the Advisory Committee held early in January 2008. Data collection occurred over a five month period, February to June 2008. The process concluded with the presentation of the final report in October 2008.

This comprehensive examination of secondary programming articulates a vision for secondary programming with the best interests of learners at its core. The process has incorporated extensive consultation and data collection,[2] while grounded in a review of the literature on effective and promising educational practices. Existing educational data have been analyzed and an inventory of existing programming has been created; all of which provide information upon which this report is based.

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1 The Committee has departmental membership from Public Schools, Advanced Education and First Nation Programs and Partnerships Branches, principals from the three high schools and school council chairs from those schools and representatives from Yukon Chiefs Committee on Education, CYFN and the Yukon First Nations Education Advisory Committee, a First Nations Elder, the Catholic Education Association of Yukon, the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, the Yukon Teachers' Association, and Yukon College.

2 A thorough discussion of the methodology is found in Chapter 3 of the full report.

B. PURPOSE

The Secondary School Programming Process began with the notion that the strengths of existing programming must be respected and maintained while, at the same time, areas for change must be identified. Recommendations should take into account the system's capacity to respond, while considering the effective use of existing resources. Programming must address the strengths and needs of **all** students.

Specifically, the Secondary Programming Process was designed to:

- articulate a vision for secondary programming in Whitehorse,
- identify issues that will impact the future of secondary programming in Whitehorse,
- identify areas for programming improvement and systemic change, building on the strengths of the current system, and
- identify facility requirements, as they relate to the delivery of secondary programming in Whitehorse, particularly in relation to the future of F.H. Collins Secondary School.

Schools Created from the Ground Up on the Basis of Student Success

". . . never permit a school to be built without first doing the research on what exactly a school has to be in order to guarantee positive student outcomes. He may discover, for example, that a whole new curriculum is needed. He may realize that without strong parental involvement, the school would have no chance to succeed. He may discover that the research tells us how each student learns differently and how technology could be leveraged to offer personalized learning opportunities. If they don't 'get it,' he may recommend that different people be hired to design the curriculum or run the school than those you have designated. Most importantly, he may realize that one definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

- Prakash Nair, *But Are They Learning? School Buildings – The Important Unasked Questions*, 2002.

Ultimately, supporting student learning and engagement must be at the heart of any educational improvement initiative. Therefore, a fundamental purpose for such an initiative is to support the success of students, preferably within the context of their family and community. It is important for schools to identify and build on learners' strengths using a holistic approach, based on educationally and culturally relevant activities within a supportive learning environment. (See adjacent text box.)

The Secondary School Programming Process provides a unique opportunity for Yukon to move beyond studying secondary education programming and facilities, to creating secondary education opportunities that engage and inspire - not only students, but also their families, their teachers, and the other adults in their lives and communities.

C. GUIDING ASSUMPTIONS AND PRINCIPLES

Guiding assumptions and principles were developed collaboratively with the Advisory Committee early in the process. It was agreed that the Secondary School Programming Process will be based on the **assumptions** that:

1. Everyone has responsibility for education. Each individual has a role and responsibility for his/her own education and for the education of others. Everyone in the community is valued for the contribution s/he makes towards education ("educational stewardship").

2. Providing the best education possible for young people should drive programming.

3. Programming should build on the strengths of all learners and should take place in a supportive learning environment, responsive to the needs and changing realities of secondary students in Yukon and their communities.

4. The strengths of existing programming will be valued while, at the same time, identifying areas for growth based on what is known of effective (validated) educational practice and what appear to be promising innovations.

5. Recommendations need to be realistic in terms of the system's capacity to respond and must ensure effective use of resources.

The **process** itself will:

1. be characterized by collaboration and respect,

2. be open and inclusive, providing opportunities for the voices of all constituent groups to be heard,

3. respect and value the diversity of cultures, languages, and communities in Yukon, leading to an understanding of "who we are" individually and collectively,

4. provide a space for reflection and action, helping bridge the gap between educational policy and practice, thus supporting innovation and growth.

CHAPTER 2: SUMMARY

A. VISION

The vision for secondary education in Yukon includes the following elements, as identified by the Advisory Committee.

- Focus on students,
- Student achievement and success to participate in post secondary and in the work force,
- Preparation to be global citizens (school, community, Canada, the world),
- Acknowledge and value cultural, linguistic, and spiritual diversity,
- Inclusive programming that addresses the needs and talents of all learners,
- Maintain high expectations for all learners,
- Increase the focus on experiential and vocational programming,
- The physical place should foster the development of a warm, caring, welcoming school environment that creates a sense of belonging.

> "We firmly believe that schools need to grow from a shared vision . . . much of that can be lost in the translation of a written vision into built form."
> - Nair and Fielding, 2005.

Similarly, in existing documents, statements include the desire for excellence, the need for student pride and self-worth, the concept of life-long learning, and the importance of connecting to the larger society, linking the personal and social contexts. These contexts include cultural, spiritual, and linguistic dimensions.

Therefore, the **vision** for secondary education can be summarized as:

Every student is a cherished member of an inclusive school community where students' individual characteristics and strengths are recognized and valued. A flexible, healthy and caring school environment, characterized by high expectations for all, supports the growth and development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will serve young people well in their future lives as contributing local and global citizens.

B. KEY FINDINGS AND EMERGING THEMES

Through the review of existing data and documentation, coupled with the process of primary data collection (interviews, focus groups, surveys, consultation), six key themes emerge. An extensive literature review on validated (proven) and promising practices in the realm of secondary education informs the themes.

1. Recognizing Strengths and Assets

Yukon education in general, and secondary education in Whitehorse in particular, exist in a context rich with opportunity. Yukon's educational philosophy has, for more than a decade, supported inclusion as an overarching philosophy, guiding the education of **all** students and contingent upon social policies defining education not as a privilege, but as a human right provided regardless of race, ethnicity, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, gender, age, or mental or physical disability ability.[3] Yukon has the opportunity to realize this vision for its secondary students.

> "The value system which holds that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education. The practice of inclusion transcends the idea of physical location, and incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship and interaction."
>
> - Yukon Department of Education, *Special Programs Service: A Handbook of Procedures and Guidelines*, 1995.

Whitehorse has a small but diverse secondary student population, attending four secondary schools. Whitehorse secondary students, school staff, parents, and community agree that the size of these secondary schools[4] is "about right." No one supports the concept of one large secondary school ("super school") serving all secondary students in Whitehorse. In existing literature on school size, secondary schools of 500 to 600 students (not dissimilar to the current secondary enrollments in Whitehorse) are viewed as appropriate: "Small school cultures promote social equity, narrower academic achievement gaps between socio-economically disadvantaged and affluent student, reduction in student drop-out rates and higher attendance levels, safer schools, student emotional stability and character development, and increased student, parent and community satisfaction."[5]

The land and environment in Yukon are potentially educational assets. Traditional Indigenous connection to the land, as well as current sensitivity to environmental issues, set the stage for using the outdoors, even more extensively, in any expansion of experiential programming.

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3 This is guaranteed under Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

4 These findings do not include École Émilie Tremblay as the school community was not included in primary data collection activities with the exception of a school site visit, as they chose not to participate.

5 Schmidt, M., Murray, C, and Nguhen, H. (2007). Cohesive Communities, Improved Schools: A Case for Small Schools. *Education Canada*, 47(4), p. 59.

In addition, Yukon is the "most connected" education system in Canada, with internet access across the territory, computer labs in schools, and video-conferencing widely available. The territory is also rich in human resources outside the education system itself, with business, labour, and community agencies, and First Nations willing to partner with education. Many programs for adolescents already offer positive experiences for young people outside the education system, but with some connections to schools (for example, Sundog). Interviews in Whitehorse and other communities not only brought forth the willingness to partner with education, but also openness to innovation - to "doing things differently" - in support of youth.

Within government, apprenticeship is a priority, providing another opportunity for growth of educational and training opportunities for students, in addition to the many that already exist. Examples of existing programs and approaches that the educational literature supports as effective practice include, among others:

- The experiential programs that exist in all Whitehorse schools, as well as at Wood Street,
- French Immersion, as well as other language programming,
- Francophone school to support language and cultural identity,
- Catholic secondary school to support faith-based education and living,
- Programs shared among schools (e.g., Wood Street),
- Supportive alternative settings, such as the Individual Learning Centre and the Teen Parent Centre,
- Learning Assistance available to students in F.H. Collins, Porter Creek and Vanier Catholic Secondary Schools,
- Tutoring available to students in all secondary schools,
- Community Education Liaison Coordinators (CELCs)/Education Support Workers (ESWs) in schools,
- Multiple other examples (school within a school, First Nations Arts and Culture for all students, Culture Week, Challenge Day, volunteer/community service, Positive Alternative to Suspension).

Many people are able to point to examples of education that already "work" for students in Yukon, as well as things that need to change. The Secondary School Programming Process recognizes and wishes to build on the strengths of the current education system and rich community assets available in Yukon, while finding ways to enhance the secondary experience for every student.

2. Individualizing for Student Success

> *"Every day brings a different feeling. When the geese fly over you feel homesick; when the snow comes, when the caribou come, you want to be home."*
> - Former Student, Old Crow

While many programs exist to support student success there remains an imperative to serve certain students better. Graduation rates for First Nations students are significantly lower, scores on the Grade 9 Yukon Achievement Tests are lower for First Nations students, and a larger proportion of First Nations students are on Individual Education Plans. Students entering secondary school in Whitehorse from communities not having their own secondary options, often lack the same level of skills as students from Whitehorse. Many struggle with the transition to secondary school, despite various support mechanisms. People in the communities, as well as educators and students, highlight these issues when interviewed. Students in one of the focus groups, as well as people at the public consultation supported a "school within a school" concept for Grade 8 or Grade 8 and 9 students to help ease the transition. The educational literature emphasizes the need to provide multiple supports for transition both before and after students move into secondary school.

The WELS program[6] is an example of a program that was intended to support students who are functioning significantly below what is required for success in the regular program. Numerous people, including current and former students, raised concerns about the criteria for placement of students in this program, as well as the program's efficacy. (There is a belief that if students come from certain communities they are automatically placed in WELS.) Furthermore, in WELS, students receive a School Leaving Certificate after participating in this program and there is a seeming lack of understanding regarding the implications of this certificate; it is not a Yukon Graduation Certificate. Students often need to take years of upgrading (for example, in Developmental Studies at Yukon College) before being able to access post-secondary programs.

> *"I have been at this school for five years . . . I can hardly wait to leave . . . [then] I'm going to college next year.*
> - WELS student

The educational literature strongly supports the need to assess, plan, and program for students as individuals. "It means recognizing and accepting that each student is a unique individual. . . . using what you know about learning and about each student to improve your teaching so that students all work in ways that have an optimal effect on their learning."[7] The literature applies the same logic to assessment which must be developmentally, culturally, age appropriate, and tailored to the strengths and experiences of each learner. Students need to be actively engaged in both their own learning and in assessing their own learning.

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6 WELS is known as Essential Skills Development (Essentials) at Porter Creek Secondary School.

7 Earl, Lorna M. (2003). *Assessment As Learning: Using Classroom Assessment to Maximize Student Learning.* Corwin Press, Inc.: Thousand Oaks, CA. p. 87.

> "We ignore at our peril the importance of relationships in education . . . . The kids most left behind in our schools . . . need those relationships most of all. They need to feel their teachers believe in them and will buoy them up if they start to sink."
>
> - Meir, 2005.

Both the educational literature and students agree about the importance of a safe, caring environment where teachers know students as individuals. The importance of relationships cannot be underestimated, nor can the necessity of holding high expectations for student success. While students in the focus groups highlight their good teachers, the student survey data show that high risk students and those from communities outside Whitehorse are less positive about their secondary school experience. Students from outside Whitehorse are less likely than their peers to see staff as caring and respecting differences. All these point to the need to find ways to understand and support the success of individual adolescent learners.

3. Creating Multiple Pathways

A strong theme throughout the primary data collection, supported by the educational literature, is the need to ensure that programming is appropriate for students. First Nations cultures, history, and languages need to be more strongly embedded in secondary schools. Students need to see themselves and their communities in the curriculum of the high school: "Culture and language will remain superficial and disconnected if it is not based on a complete understanding of how Indigenous knowledge is deeply rooted in people's lives and consciousness. It is essential, as well, to take into account the diversity of indigenous cultures and experiences."[8] Living culture and language is evident in Yukon in École Émilie Tremblay, while Vanier Catholic Secondary School provides an example of faith and spirituality's connection to young people's lives and education. Promising practices in First Nations education promote learning as a holistic, experiential process, connected to community, people and nature: "[Education] is a value-laden process using experience, storytelling, ritual and ceremony, dreaming, tutoring, and artistic creation. At its heart, indigenous education is a spiritual endeavour."[9] In addition, examples exist of curricula that integrate traditional Indigenous values, teaching principles and concepts of nature with those of Western science.

> "Recent studies also indicate that the brain seems to exhibit plasticity . . . [with its] demonstration through 'experiential learning.' This means that the brain has the ability to change as a result of rich experience though active, personal and engaging learning activities."
>
> - Madrazo and Motz, 2005.

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8 Wotherspoon, T. & Schissel, B. (1998). *Decolonization and Voice: Prospects for Aboriginal Education in Canada*, Discussion Paper, Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda, prepared for Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, p. 3

9 G. Cajete, as referenced by Spicer, C. (n.d.). Carrying on Despite the Violent Twentieth Century: A Tenacious History of People's Education, *Creating Learning Communities*; http://www.creatinglearningcommunities.org/book/roots/spicer.html

The expansion of experiential learning – and ensuring access to a broader range of students – was a desire expressed by all constituent groups, whether current students, parents, former students, community members, or educators, both in and beyond Whitehorse. (Wood Street is highly valued, despite concerns about access and potential elitism. Data indicate few students from communities outside Whitehorse have attended Wood Street.) Experiential learning dovetails with brain-based learning and new understandings of adolescent brain development. Experiential learning invites adolescents to be "empowered with opportunities to develop their brains through activities in which they choose to actively participate."[10] As one student notes: *"Not everyone learns through a desk."*

> *"Everyone has different ways of learning . . . classes should not just be focused for kids who can sit at a desk and learn off a chalkboard. Everyone is different."*
>
> - Grade 12 Student

In addition, research on boy learners suggests that the traditional classroom is "generally a better fit for the verbal-emotive, sit-still, takes notes, listen-carefully, multi-tasking girl. Teachers tended to view the natural assets that boys bring to learning – impulsivity, single-task focus, spatial-kinesthetic learning, and physical aggression – as problems."[11] Allowing for more physical movement and visual opportunities, as well as "balancing multi-tasking with project-driven and depth-driven learning"[12] all provide more appropriate learning environments for many males.

Authentic learning can also come via technical-vocational programming (or the arts, as students in the focus groups remind us). Currently only 15.6% of Yukoners hold a trades certificate or diploma; the territory has many opportunities for employment in the skilled trades arena. Interestingly, on the issue of students being prepared for employment, employers answering the survey were not satisfied with the ability of young people to work independently and manage their own work.

> *"I would like more trades . . . there's too much emphasis on academics."*
>
> - Grade 12 Student

Virtually all those who participated in the Secondary School Programming Process identified the need for skilled trades and the fact that these occupations should be more highly valued. The literature suggests that the alignment of school-based and work-based learning, academic and vocational programming, and secondary and post-secondary education; "can eliminate the boundary between academic and vocational education, and combine practice and theory to better educate students in obtaining necessary skills and knowledge."[13] Effective practices in technical vocational education include: high expectations, a rigorous program of study, academic studies, intellectually challenging career/technical studies, work-based learning, teachers working together, students actively engaged, a guidance and adviser system, a structured system of extra help, and a culture of continuous improvement.

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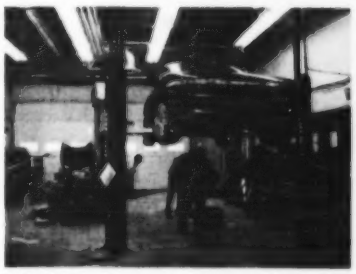
10 Spano, S. (2003). Adolescent Brain Development, *Youth Studies Australia*, 22(1), p.38.
11 Ibid, p. 57.
12 Ibid, p. 59.
13 Wu, (2004), p. 11.

Apprenticeship is one avenue for young people that is currently a government priority, as each Canadian province and territory governs its own training and certification policies. Again, many people supported the provision of more apprenticeship opportunities for adolescents, although finding qualified teachers who also hold a Red Seal was raised as serious challenge. Educational structures and institutions across the country have had to respond with a multiplicity of approaches including partnerships with employers, unions, and community organizations. The literature suggests a need to bring new groups into the apprenticeship system, form partnerships that are grounded in and reflect the community, secure long term funding, and share what works and does not work in the community: "Make materials available that demonstrate how essential skills are used in apprenticeship. Support generic applied learning initiatives such as applied math, technical and professional communication and applied science. Co-develop courses specific to trades."[14]



Other important pathways include language learning. With the French Immersion population growing proportionately to the English program, secondary programming in French Immersion will continue to be needed. In addition, if a greater emphasis is given to teaching First Nations languages, enhancing the "language nest" concept at F. H. Collins is a logical extension.

Using technology to support distance learning can provide another pathway for secondary education for some students, whether these be students who are living in remote communities, elite athletes, or medically complex students. The technology exists through the use of web-based courses and video-conferencing to provide courses to students at a distance. However, the technology must be viewed as a tool or method, with the focus on learning rather than the technology. Principles include: design for active and effective learning, provide support through a variety of means (tutorial, student advising, counselling, technical support), develop and maintain both the technological and human infrastructure, and sustain administration and commitment to quality distance education. E-learning and video-conferencing can both allow for the connection of students and teachers in real time and aid in the creation of a virtual community of learners.

If students are to find their pathway to learning, they need support. The need for more counselling to help students plan for their lives after secondary school was identified as issue by numerous students. They need assistance with course selection, something that affects all students, but particularly those from communities outside Whitehorse; course selection being based on students' strengths and interests. Students also want more information about options after high school: *"I don't think we get enough information on university, but there is even less on trades."*

[14] Ibid., p. 27.

Multiple pathways can also mean that students have options to step out and step back into secondary education, or work on completion of their secondary education on a part-time basis. Currently, the Individual Learning Centre (ILC) provides such an option; however, flexible modularized learning can come in different forms, as people noted in the community interviews and public consultation.

Finally, the surveys show that, while everyone believes it is very important for secondary schools to provide students with skills for school success, there are differences in the top priorities among the various constituent groups. Students are more focused on job preparation than are their teachers or parents. However, students are not a homogenous group. Students taking First Nations language courses and those taking technical vocational courses have quite different priorities than their counterparts, including the importance of healthy lifestyles, financial planning, and career preparation.

4. Enhancing Collaboration and Partnerships

In all the interviews with community members (including business/employers, labour, First Nations representatives, Yukon College representatives, community agencies and organizations,) there was an openness to partnering with Education. From the curriculum supports and resources developed by the Vuntut Gwich'in Cultural Technology Project in Old Crow, to a planned labour-related training centre in Whitehorse, to the facilities currently available at Yukon College, community assets abound.

> *"We want to get youth involved in our programs, particularly in health and safety programs . . . [particularly because] of the Yukon's safety record. . . We want to work with Advanced Education and create partnerships . . . we have already signed a partnership with First Nations to encourage First Nations youth to get involved in the trades . . . we are building a training centre . . . we are open to partnerships to deliver programs."*
>
> - Labour Representative

The same is true when thinking about parents, family, and community members. While much effort has been expended by educators in trying to enhance home-school links, secondary schools often struggle with creating and utilizing these connections. The most promising endeavours appear to be those which use a school community strategic approach that "includes educators, students, parents and community partners who work together to improve the school and enhance students' learning opportunities."[15] Parents of students and former students, particularly in communities outside Whitehorse, express a desire for a better understanding of their child's secondary experience and the implications of programming decisions that are made. Some of those interviewed also suggested that School Councils could be more representative and more effective.

[15] Epstein, J. L. & Salinas, K. C. (2004). Partnering with Families and Communities, *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 12.

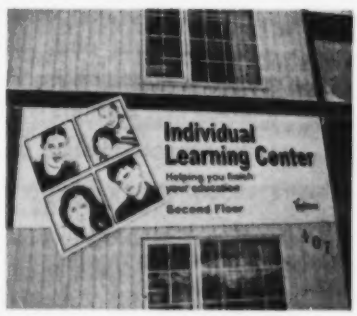
In terms of connecting school with community in meaningful ways, recent Canadian work suggests that educators re-frame their thinking to see themselves as guests in a community first. Only after educators know how to behave as 'guests' can they act as 'hosts.' Being a guest means learning about the community by "spending time and energy to know the context, the history, the culture(s), and particularly the people who reside there."[16] Through such re-framing, educators have the opportunity to view the community-school relationship in new ways. This may open up new possibilities for seeing community resources as assets. Elijah Smith School is one local example of reaching out to community.

Finally, there is the issue of sharing and collaboration among schools. While examples exist of shared programming, some people expressed concern regarding competition among schools. Students admit to teacher and program "shopping." The challenge remains; how to support collaboration and sharing among schools, while retaining their unique cultures and characteristics and avoiding unproductive competition?

5. Supporting Flexibility

Students express some frustration at the traditional high school experience, often because of lack of engagement, irrelevance of curriculum, and unnecessary regimentation. Those attending – as well as those who have attended - Wood Street highly value the Wood Street experience. Current students identified the fact that *"it's not so regulated, no bells, laid back." "You grow up a lot in these programs. It's not getting up, walking to school, going class to class; here every day is different. We are not robots."* As previously discussed, Wood Street programs (with the exception of OPES and PASE) are attended by students from all the Whitehorse secondary schools, as well as some students from other communities. Therefore, Wood Street provides an example of flexible and authentic learning experiences, as well as shared programming.

As previously mentioned, the Individual Learning Centre (ILC) provides an example of a different kind of flexible learning environment. While mentors know and support students as individuals, learners also have flexibility of time and workload. In the public consultations, the ILC was recognized as an important alternative for young people.



[16] Ibid., p. 10.

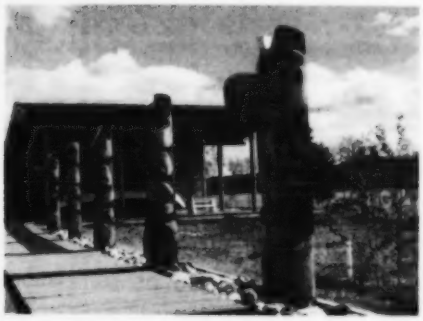
Communities outside Whitehorse, including parents, educators, and community members, suggest a variety of ways to make secondary education more inclusive of their children. Ideas include: having students go to Whitehorse for part of the year while offering intensive courses with master teachers who come to the community for the other part of the school year; having teachers come and assess students the year before they are to go to Whitehorse to determine their skill levels and set up an individual learning plan, if needed; offering experiential (particularly land-based) programs in the communities, open to students from across the territory (*"why can't ACES be delivered here?"*); greater use of distance learning technologies; altered school calendars, such as longer school days in the dark months and shorter when there are more hours of sunlight, or experiential courses in the summer months. There was openness to exploring alternative schedules in the public consultations as well. Advocates of modified calendar schools (year round schooling) point to advantages of more continuous learning, increased student motivation, and decreased teacher burnout and absenteeism. While there is little research on the actual effectiveness of alternative schedules, the literature reminds us that schedule changes should be motivated by what is good for student learning and engagement, not what might be convenient for adults.

In a number of instances (particularly with students and educators) the tie to the British Columbia curriculum and examination schedule was viewed as barrier to flexibility. While Yukon participates in the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for curriculum development, Yukon-developed curricula are the exception, apparently because of human capacity limitations.

6. Making Strengths Systemic

To make the current strengths of programming systemic and introducing enhancements, educators (including those in the Department of Education) as well as First Nations representatives, cite the need for better tracking of individual students. People identify the need to know what practices are truly effective for learners in Yukon. The educational literature certainly supports the importance of evidence-informed decision-making.

While the Secondary Programming Process was originally focused on secondary programming in Whitehorse, implications range far beyond programming for Whitehorse secondary schools. Students and their families from communities without full secondary programs face issues that are not part of the reality of Whitehorse youth and families. This raises issues beyond transition into secondary school in Whitehorse, such as the possibilities for making the secondary system more flexible so that students have more choices than simply to attend secondary school in



Whitehorse - or not. The lower achievement level of students in rural communities also speaks to systemic issues that appear to need attention, but which are primarily beyond the scope of this process.

Beyond programming, it has been argued that "fundamental systemic change is required for First Nations students and communities to achieve their educational goals."[17] Such system changes include improved communication and expectations between schools and post-secondary institutions, better professional development for educators and para-professionals to help them develop an understanding of Yukon First Nations history, communities and issues, a strategy for increasing the number of First Nations teachers and administrators, as well as attracting and retaining high quality teachers and administrators in rural communities. Again, this may be beyond the scope of this process, but still warrants attention.

If improvements to student learning and engagement at the secondary level are to become realities in Yukon, program enhancement and new facilities are not the long term answers; systemic changes that promote inclusion and excellence for all are the real solutions.

C. CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The following conclusions arise from the previous discussion of the themes emerging from the Secondary Programming Process. The conclusions are followed by proposed directions for the future.

1. Recognizing Strengths and Assets

It can be concluded that:

- Yukon has many educational, community, and environmental assets upon which to draw,
- Student diversity (individual and cultural) should be considered strengths,
- Many programs and supports (including caring and exceptional teachers) exist in Whitehorse secondary schools,
- Secondary school sizes are close to optimal; balancing course options with school sizes that do not overwhelm students.

[17] Executive Committee of the Education Reform Project. (2007). First Nations students, *Education Reform Project: Final Report*, p. 2.23.

It is recommended that:

a. Programs and supports that are working for students should be maintained (preferably if evidence exists that they are indeed effective);

b. Educator professional development should have a focus on understanding the cultural assets that students bring to their schools and their own learning;

c. One "super" secondary school should not be considered as an option for Whitehorse.

2. Individualizing for Student Success

It can be concluded that:

- There is a need to assess, program, and plan with and for students as individuals, considering that some programs (WELS) may have strayed from their original intentions,
- More needs to be done to support positive transitions for students into secondary school, particularly for those students from communities outside Whitehorse,
- There is a need for high expectations for **all** students (First Nations, boy learners, students with special needs, students with English as an Additional Language) building on their strengths, while supporting any areas that need bolstering,
- There is a need to synchronize programming across Yukon, so students are entering secondary school at comparable academic levels and all students have equitable opportunities as they enter secondary school.

It is recommended that:

a. WELS be discontinued; different options (with a focus on individualization) be developed to support students with specific academic challenges;

b. Existing supports for transition be maintained, with more emphasis being placed on the role of CELCs/ESWs, perhaps having a designated coordinator position jointly funded by Department of Education and Council of Yukon First Nations;

c. The "school within a school" concept for Grades 8 and 9 be implemented in secondary schools, as appropriate to each school;

d. To further support transition, new strategies need to be introduced, prior to students entering Whitehorse secondary schools, which should be developed in consultation with students, families, educators, and First Nations governments;

e. Assessments need to determine the actual academic level of all Whitehorse students prior to entering secondary school, so that plans can be put in place to assist students who require additional supports;

f. Assessment also needs to include assessment of, for, and as learning in order to support student engagement in learning which, in turn, speaks to the need for teacher professional development in this domain;

g. The Department of Education deploy consultants to work with educators in communities to help teachers raise standards and expectations for students in their communities in order to increase educational success.

3. Creating Multiple Pathways

It can be concluded that:

- Some students do not have access to appropriate secondary programming,
- Curriculum in Yukon requires more integration of First Nations history, cultures, and languages,
- French Immersion programming at the secondary level will continue to be needed,
- Expansion of experiential learning opportunities is required,
- Secondary students need more opportunities to be active as participants in their own learning,
- More opportunities for students to complete secondary education, in optional ways and through alternative timeframes, are needed,
- Trades, technical-vocational and apprenticeship opportunities need to be enhanced and viewed as opportunities for all students, not ghettoized,
- Distance learning technologies need to be explored and implemented as multiple options,
- Students and families do not always understand the implications of secondary school course and placement decisions,
- Students need improved supports to assist them in making decisions about secondary and post-secondary options.

It is recommended that:

a. Concerted efforts be made to integrate the First Nations history and cultures in secondary schools, so these are part of education for all,

b. Enhanced and expanded First Nations language programs, that operate in part beyond traditional classroom walls, be available in Whitehorse secondary schools,

c. F. H. Collins continue to host the secondary French Immersion programming with increasing emphasis on the school as a centre for language learning (enhancing the existing "language nest" concept which can include First Nations languages, other languages, and ESL/EAL),

d. Experiential programming be expanded, including programs in Whitehorse secondary schools, as well as programming in other communities,

e. Criteria for entrance into Wood Street programming be reviewed to ensure that all students have equitable access to Wood Street programs,

f. A central community board, with a district coordinator or executive director, be established to coordinate technical-vocational programming in Whitehorse that utilizes existing and future training facilities,

g. A coherent Distance Learning strategy be developed that builds on the technologies available in Yukon in order to give students more flexible options to complete secondary school,

h. Emphasis be placed on career counselling, in terms of students selecting appropriate secondary courses, as well as working towards desired post-secondary options,

i. All pathways lead to graduation.

4. Enhancing Collaboration and Partnerships

It can be concluded that:

- Opportunities exist for multiple partnerships and use of community resources to support secondary programming in Whitehorse,
- Yukon College is an important community resource willing to expand partnerships with Education,
- Government will need to be flexible and act in new ways in order to support innovative partnerships,
- There is a need for increased collaboration and communication with families about options available to their children and the implications of these decisions,
- There is a need for greater valuing and using what families and communities have to offer to education.

It is recommended that:

a. Partnerships with community stakeholders be actively explored, particularly as part of a coordinated Whitehorse technical-vocational strategy (see recommendation 3.f),

b. The Department of Education and Yukon College identify opportunities for enhanced partnering,

c. The Department of Education engage individual communities to work with schools and communities to develop strategies that engage families and communities meaningfully in the life of the school,

d. The role and composition of School Councils be reviewed in order to promote increased family engagement and broader representation.

5. Supporting Flexibility

It can be concluded that:

- Students require more support to determine what programming is best for them (based on their strengths, needs, and interests) and to explore the range of future options open to them,
- Opportunities exist for schools to share programs and facilities without the dynamic of negative competition,
- Communities are open to alternative schedules,
- Curriculum needs to reflect more closely Yukon context and realities.

It is recommended that:

a. Counselling support to secondary students be enhanced to ensure that students (especially those from rural communities) are choosing appropriate courses and understand their post-secondary school options,

b. Technical-vocational, artistic, and experiential programs be open to all secondary students,

c. A new system of secondary education that provides alternatives for completing secondary education be developed (e.g., using distance learning, master teachers in communities, experiential programs in communities),

d. The secondary curriculum offerings be evaluated to determine which courses are appropriate for the Yukon and which need to be locally developed based on Western and Northern Canadian Protocol guidelines and Yukon context.

6. Making Strengths Systemic

It can be concluded that:

- There is a need for tracking student success (evidence-informed practice), as well as a need for increased accountability within the system,
- Implications of secondary programming in Whitehorse affect education beyond Whitehorse,
- There is a need to look at synergies and system-wide vision to support secondary programming.

> *"There's something said when the school makes it all geared up for graduation; that's for leaving and that's what they celebrate. Make us excited about staying."*
>
> - Grade 12 Student

It is recommended that:

a. A tracking system that follows individual students through their school careers be instituted (including demographics, achievement, attendance),

b. The same academic expectations be applied to students in communities outside Whitehorse, and that these be supported by making education in these communities a priority for Department of Education consultants who can act as mentors and master teachers, assisting teachers with planning, instruction, and assessment.

7. Facility Implications

It can be concluded that:

- There is a need to create caring, healthy environments and welcoming spaces in secondary schools for students, parents/community, and adults in the schools,
- Technical-vocational facilities should be shared and integrated with artistic and academic programming,
- School design literature indicates that a variety of spaces are necessary to support various learning modalities.

It is recommended that:

a. Existing secondary schools be supported to ensure that their facilities, strengths, and unique cultures are maintained and enhanced, as appropriate,

b. Any new facility to replace F. H. Collins Secondary School be designed not as the traditional school "box," but rather as a facility that responds to the latest understanding of student learning and related school design,

c. Technical-vocational programming take advantage (as much as possible) of existing facilities, but that where gaps exist, a new or refurbished facility be used as a central location that can be shared by all secondary schools. This shared facility could also include arts and expanded experiential programming and could connect to community-based programs (e.g., Sundog). In such a facility, schools could bring their own cultures and identities in partnership with community resources,

d. The development of any new facility(ies) includes input from a multi-stakeholder community team.

8. Implementation Implications

This report includes directions for the future that span the short, medium, and long terms. Therefore, it is recommended that:

a. A comprehensive strategy be developed to deal with the recommendations of this report (including priorities, costs, and timelines),

b. An implementation manager (or equivalent) and a multi-constituent team be put in place to ensure the strategy is specified and implemented,

c. This report be made public.

D. CONSULTANT OBSERVATIONS

As the team who has conducted the Secondary Programming Process, we have some observations and reflections on our experiences. First, we were struck by how open and welcoming Yukoners were and how everyone willingly shared personal experiences, perceptions, insights, and suggestions for the future of secondary education in Yukon. We were also impressed by the depth and breadth of the strengths and assets that are present within the education system, the secondary schools in Whitehorse, the Whitehorse community, as well as the rural communities which we visited.

Yukon, like many jurisdictions across Canada, lives with cultural and racial tensions that have the potential to play themselves out in public institutions. Yukon has the advantage of being a "younger" jurisdiction where history may be more easily overcome and Indigenous knowledge and cultures can be viewed as significant assets. These must be recognized in communities outside Whitehorse, where educational stewardship must be promoted and valued. However, the educational system must be cognizant of the fact that the many First Nations families who send their children to secondary school in Whitehorse must deal emotionally with the legacy of residential schools, as well as other systemic barriers. Consequently, any new facility may require focus on a new and culturally responsive educational philosophy which may have to be actualized through a new name, to represent a new beginning. There is incredible opportunity to move forward in the spirit of equity and inclusion.

Finally, we end with optimism. While not particularly "scientific," we felt an energy and excitement about what secondary programming can offer to the future of young Yukoners. The time is NOW to harness the energy for change, resolving past issues, while valuing and building on the many strengths and assets so prevalent in Yukon schools, communities, families, and young people.

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